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REVIEWS

WASHINGTON IRVING ONCE MORE

In Professor Bowen's appreciative essay on Washington Irving in the April SEWANEE REVIEW there is one point in which, on a question of taste, some of his readers might hesitate to agree with him, and there are two slight inaccuracies which have been suffered to creep in, and which serve to convey somewhat erroneous impressions.

Speaking of the "Sketch Book" Professor Bowen asserts that: "A popular vote would probably put 'The Wife,' 'Rip Van Winkle' and 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' easily first, and this verdict would be confirmed by critical judgment. While all are good, these three sketches are felt to be the finest. Their tender pathos, imaginative humor, simplicity and grace have already endeared these three to the hearts of thousands of readers who have lingered, almost spellbound, over their pages; and their charm and beauty will, no doubt, commend them to generations of readers yet unborn. Of this trio 'Rip Van Winkle,' in the popular estimate (perhaps also in the estimate of the critics), is entitled to first place" (p. 175).

In spite of differences of taste, however, it is a question whether, either by popular vote or by critical judgment, so slight and effusively sentimental a sketch as "The Wife" would be ranked along with such classics as "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." It is even doubtful whether any critics would place this sketch before "The Voyage," with its dreamy reveries so unlike the feverish excitement of a five-day trip on a modern ocean grey-hound, or the Addisonian sketch of "The Country Church," or "Westminster Abbey," with its "notes of the deep-laboring organ" and its solemn meditations among the tombs, reminiscent of Sir Thomas Browne's *Hydriotaphia*. Or what reader would prefer George and Mary in their vine-clad cottage to that leisurely visit to Stratford and the quiet rambles along the banks of the Avon? Where in "The Wife" is there anything comparable to the glimpse of Geoffrey

Crayon in the inn parlor, comfortably seated on his arm-chair throne and wielding his poker-sceptre (both now so carefully preserved and jealously guarded); the delicious humor with which are described the "eloquent dame who shows the Shakespeare house" and her rival, the "gray-headed sexton" and his "superannuated crony," John Ange; the exquisite ease with which Irving's fancy plays about the relics exhibited to him by these "worthy wights," and the good-humored credulity with which he invests all he sees with the "charm of reality;" his reflections on the singular gift of the poet, Shakespeare, "to be able thus to spread the magic of his mind over the very face of nature, to give to things and places a charm and character not their own, and to turn 'this working-day world' into a perfect fairy-land;" and lastly his characteristic moralizing on the emptiness of worldly renown as compared with the "love, admiration and applause, which spring up in his native place," and his rejoicing in the thought that the mighty poet's ashes rest, not in a crowded corner of Westminster Abbey, but in the quiet little village church, "gathered in peace among his kindred and his early friends?"

And now for some matters of fact. On page 179, besides the bad misprint, "A Town in the Prairies" for "A Tour of the Prairies," appears the somewhat confusing statement, "The Recollections [of Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey] were made up of the author's reminiscences of his visits to the historical old abbeys indicated in the title." It is difficult to see how Abbotsford could properly be called "an old abbey," and it is certain that Irving's delightful picture of Scott's family life and his description of the rambles he took up Rhymer's Glen and about the Eildons and other romantic places with the "sterling, golden-hearted old worthy" deserve more than passing mention.

In commenting on the "rollicking humor, the freshness and buoyancy of the narrative, and the whimsical, charming style", of "Knickerbocker's History," Professor Bowen adds: "It is, however, but just to observe that the first few chapters which, by the way, are the product of the collaboration of his brother with Irving, appear somewhat stilted, pompous and pedantic."

and make the unhappy impression that the authors were feeling their way and not sure of their footing'' (p. 173).

The divergence in style, however, is due to an altogether different reason. Irving and his brother Peter began the book as a "mere *jeu d'esprit*" in burlesque of Dr. Samuel Mitchell's "Picture of New York," then just published, and with this view they took a vast quantity of notes, in emulation of the erudition displayed in the commencement of that work, which began with an account of the Aborigines." On the departure of his brother Peter for Europe, Irving proceeded with the History alone, completely "changed the whole plan of the work, and discarding what had reference to a later period than the Dutch dynasty, and grappling with the other mass of notes, undertook to frame a work according to his new conception. I have heard him say he had hard work to condense into its present shape, the ponderous mass of notes which had been taken for the first book, as a burlesque of erudition and pedantry; that he managed, with infinite labor, to compress it into five introductory chapters, and in subsequent editions would have been glad to compress these into one, but was deterred from undertaking it by the labor it would cost" ("Life and Letters," Chap. xiii). No wonder, then, that the style should appear somewhat pedantic and labored.

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HISTORY

THE TERRITORIAL ARCHIVES OF MISSISSIPPI

Every new step in the publication of the Archives of the Southern States is a source of gratification not only to the State which authorizes and the individual who executes the work of publishing, but also to the ever increasing number of students of Southern history. Hence we have a warm welcome for the first of the series of Archives of Mississippi, which has recently been printed under the editorship of Mr. Dunbar Rowland, Director of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.